

THE DEVIL CHAIR

A Chronicle of the Strange Adventures of John Haynes and His Gyroscopic Vehicle

THE ARM OF JUSTICE.

By H. M. EGBERT

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In his comfortable bachelor house in the Western town of Nokomis, Judge Charteris was seated in his arm chair. But he was not seated as a judge should sit, well poised and at ease, secure in the consciousness of his integrity and the approbation of his fellow men. Judge Charteris was huddled up and crouching forward, a drained glass of whisky and milk at his right hand, and to his left a hardy, inhaled perfect to himself slowly away in an asphyxiated. The Judge's face was an unhealthy yellow, touched here and there with streaks of livid white which gave it a curiously blotched appearance. And, in fact, the man was trembling upon the verge of a nervous breakdown.

He had returned that afternoon from the court in which he had earned a reputation for the severe sentences which he meted out to the wretched criminals who fell into the clutches of the law. There he exemplified the law's outraged majesty; but here he was nothing but a cowardly, weak, elderly man, with a whole life of evil and injustice stretching away behind him and the unknown future ever drawing more near.

The knowledge that his life was passing and that it had availed him nothing bore heavily on him at times of introspection. But now the cause of his despair was more immediate. It lay upon the table, a sheet of paper taken from an envelope that had been posted in Pittsburgh, which he had received some minutes before. On the envelope were scrawled four words: "Your turn comes next," they said.

That was all; there was no signature—but he knew well what that message portended. When, five years previously, he had assisted in the Nokomis Land Company's nefarious scheme in return for a thousand shares in it, he had imagined that he could place his memories away and grind his conscience under foot, as he had done so many times. John Haynes, the millionaire owner of the estates which the land gang had coveted, was an Englishman, ignorant of the law, the customs, and of the country. He had been torn from his wife and daughter, railroaded into the penitentiary for fourteen years as Pete Timmons, a gang leader—and the gang secured his lands, those upon which Nokomis stood. Five years went by—five years of loneliness and despair for Haynes. Then he was placed in the penitentiary machine shop, where he invented a gyroscopic attachment which would propel any vehicle at an incredible rate of speed; he had escaped by means of it, and, one by one, was hunting down and punishing the men who had betrayed and plundered him.

None of them knew where the next blow would fall or who would be the victim. Now here, now there, East, West and South, John Haynes went like the wind in some infernal contrivance propelled by his gyroscope. And each visit was followed by swift and terrible retribution.

Had it been death alone that would satisfy him, John Haynes might have been met by armed men; his victims would have taken heart and armed themselves and gone abroad like assassins.

Judge Charteris looked up. The light was dying out of the West, the desolate prairies stretched almost up to the threshold of his home. Charteris shuddered in such a land anything was possible. He would flee, he would go south to warmer climes and leave no trail behind him. The letter had been posted only two days before. Surely, if he acted at once, he could yet contrive to elude that terrible vengeance.

He would leave no sign of his departure. He would pack a couple of suit cases, rush East upon a special car to Des Moines or Omaha, and there vanish. His shares had been sold long since; his money was salted away in banks in various cities. If he abandoned everything in Nokomis, money, house, land, reputation, he could still reach Florida with more than a hundred thousand dollars in gold. Panic-stricken, he could think of nothing else to do.

He reached his trembling hand out to the telephone. "Give me Girouard, 27," he called. "Hello! Is that you, Mr. Hopkins? This is Judge Charteris speaking. I've got to go to Omaha at once on private business. Private, mind you; nobody must know. Can you get me a special car inside two hours?"

He heard the President of the Nokomis and Western answer: "Sorry, but the trains are stalled in snow-drifts. Now if you wanted to go West I could manage it, but—"

"Then I'll go West," cried Charteris, terror-stricken at this conspiracy of the elements against him. "For God's sake get me a special car for any where—San Francisco, Portland, Los Angeles—"

Between himself and Hopkins existed an intimacy of many years' standing. It had been born in infancy, when both were struggling lawyers, it had been nursed by Charteris through days of growing self-respect and importance, until it blossomed into a

close league for mutual aid. In the end he arranged to go to Portland, Oregon. Charteris knew that Hopkins would not betray him.

In a cluster of trees, perched upon the summit of the lone hill that dominated the town, John Haynes was watching the Judge's house, which stood on the outskirts of Nokomis, through a powerful field-glass.

He knew that the letter would reach him when he left his court that afternoon. He had seen him enter the house, saw it blaze up with lights, and, in imagination, saw his enemy receive the blow.

He was seated in a strange-looking vehicle. It might have been described best as a runabout, but it was unlike any make now on the market, for it was built like a farmer's cart, and as it snorted and puffed westward through the sparsely settled country it had excited great derision among the inhabitants, whose motor cars were always of the latest pattern. But what the bucolics of Kansas and Nebraska and Colorado did not know was that at night the four wheels were detached and placed within the vehicle, which, running upon a single wheel, driven by the gyroscope, outpaced the swiftest trains in its mad flight toward Nokomis. In a blinding snow storm John Haynes had brought his companion to their post on the top of the hill. The wheels were removed, the huge tank stored with gasoline; now they were waiting, comfortable enough in the warm and weather-proof interior, stocked as it was with food and even luxuries for road travel.

"He'll bolt," said Haynes with conviction. "Tomorrow morning he will take a train eastward. I know the dog; he won't dare wait to take his medicine."

Suddenly lights flashed through the gloom below them. Immediately afterward, borne across the stillness of the night air, came the chugging of a locomotive.

"He's going to bolt now!" John Haynes cried in exultation. "Theobald, your duty will soon be at an end."

"Thank God!" ejaculated the other forcibly, and, stooping down, he began to unroll a little surgeon's case in which were the instruments of his craft.

"You've done well, Theobald," said John Haynes, seating himself beside him. "And after tonight you can wipe me out of your memory. Reflect, man; he continued, placing his strong hands upon the other's shoulders, "you might have been in his situation to-night."

"It's a terrible job," said Theobald. "All justice is terrible, Doctor," answered the other. "But it is less terrible than crime. When you assisted the land gang to railroad me into the penitentiary, when you left me crippled and helpless with a treacherous bullet in my spine which you were bribed not to remove—was not that terrible?"

"I know—I know," Theobald muttered, uncorking the bottle of bichloride of mercury with which he was to sterilize his instruments.

"When I held you at my mercy," John Haynes pursued relentlessly, "I laid upon you two conditions. First, that you should cure me—and that you did. Second, that when I summoned you you should obey my call. You have obeyed—and after tonight you can forget the past; it will be atoned for and you shall never see me again."

"But this—is this the dream of a madman?" muttered the doctor. "It can't succeed."

"It will succeed, Theobald," answered Haynes sternly, "and by reason of its inherent justice, even though it may be as you say, a madman's dream. Perhaps I am mad—but I have suffered and I will exact justice to the uttermost."

He broke off and, taking up the glass, peered long and hard through it. An automobile was chugging in the road before Judge Charteris' house. Down at the station a heavy locomotive was revolving on the turntable, just visible as the two bright lights spun their circular course through the gloom. Haynes placed his hand upon the steering wheel.

"East or West, it is all one," he said. "Theobald, are you ready?"

The doctor folded up his instrument case, Haynes pressed a spring and the strange vehicle sped off through the darkness at a moderate rate, ran into the prairie, and returned toward the station by a different route. Outside the yards it stopped and Haynes descended. Now it could be seen that he was wearing a dark gray uniform, upon the breast of which was a pointed star. The station master came up to him.

"Taking a special out to-night?" asked Haynes.

"What's that to you?" the other retorted. His eyes fell on the badge.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"I'm the sheriff of Blue River," answered John Haynes. "There's been an attempt at a hold-up in the Blue Mountains. Logs were placed across the line, and the west-bound limited was nearly derailed. Two bullets were fired and one went into the cab. It's

believed to be the work of Clancy's gang."

"West bound, did you say?" exclaimed the other. "Why—why—" He broke off and eyed the other suspiciously again. "I guess there won't be no hold-ups with this special," he answered grimly. "There's nothing worth plundering aboard of her and there'll be two armed men in the cab. Get that?"

"You seem to think I'm one of the thieves," remarked Haynes petulantly in the broad dialect of the West.

"Why," said the other candidly, "maybe you are and maybe you ain't. But there won't be no hold-ups on this special. Thanks!"

Haynes spun on his heel as though offended and re-entered the vehicle, which proceeded slowly westward along the road that ran for a short distance parallel with the embankment. About a mile from the station it ended in a deep gully, beyond which was nothing but flat prairie for a hundred miles and a little more, until the steep ascent of the Blue Mountains began. Haynes laughed grimly as they sped through the darkness.

"He's going west, then," he said. "It's lucky we had this old auto covered, Theobald, for it must be nearly zero outside. Keep up your courage, man; in two hours, or three at the outside, all will be over and you'll be on your way back to your comfortable house in Nokomis, as snug as though you'd never left your bed to answer my summons."

They drew up the automobile and waited patiently, some distance from the road, in case the station master should send searchers for them. Three hundred feet from the embankment they would have escaped the observation of the most keen-eyed hunters in that darkness and in the snow which fell steadily about them.

Meanwhile Judge Charteris, suitcases in hand, was waiting at the railroad station. He had driven his own automobile through the bitter weather and now stamped impatiently up and down the platform, waiting for the engine and car to come alongside. When it arrived he noticed the two guards beside the driver.

"Who are those men?" he asked sharply.

"Assistants," answered the station-master. He would not arouse the Judge's fears by detailing the news of the hold-up which he had received. With sure instinct he had discerned the lie that had been told him. He had no doubt that the two men were actually members of Clancy's gang sent to make observations. But, being unarmed, he had prudently suffered them to withdraw. He had privately instructed the driver to keep a sharp lookout for obstacles upon the track. Only at one spot could such be placed, for the prairie stretched away, without a sign of a tree, clear to the Blue Mountains—and there on and on again until the foothills of the Rockies and the broad alkali plains confronted them. At the Blue Mountains only, where the engine must slow down to surmount the hills, could any attempt occur. And the guards carried loaded rifles.

Judge Charteris knew nothing of any danger. His only danger he felt he had shaken off when he stepped into his warm, comfortable car. Hopkins had not forgotten his love of comfort. Beside the sleeping berth was a table piled with magazines, a box of choice cigars, and a little case containing some of those liqueurs which the Judge dearly loved. When the train drew out of Nokomis he settled himself down in his chair, all fear forsaking him.

He meant to take ship at Portland for San Francisco under an alias; thence to double back on his tracks toward the south, possibly to cross into Mexico. His plans were not matured. Confident that he had outwitted his former victim, he placed his fears behind him.

He had no ties. He lived the luxurious, selfish life of an elderly bachelor. To break new ground was easy. He had no qualms. He had meant to retire soon anyway. He felt that he had acted wisely in arriving at his decision to fly.

He had heard the name Clancy mentioned softly as he was about to step into the car, and the word sent a sudden flash of recollection through his brain. He remembered Clancy—that patient, easy-going middle-aged man who had become involved in a law-suit with the Nokomis Land Company a year or two previously. Clancy had been a power in Nokomis by reason of his large interests there and his unswerving honesty. It had been a stiff fight before the land gang trapped him. Judge Charteris shivered as he remembered how, when he sentenced him to ten years in the penitentiary, Clancy had threatened him in court and denounced him as a tool of the confederates. Then had come the spectacular escape from prison; and the respectable, portly gentleman—a little like himself—had become an outlaw and the terror of the country. Yes, it was well that he had planned this flight.

The train rolled on. A blissful

peace descended over Judge Charteris. He nodded his head and dozed, his repose deepened, soothed by the good whisky with which his friend Hopkins had supplied him. When he awakened, he had reflected, he would be speeding through the desert, miles from Nokomis. Had he not better undress and go to bed? Before he answered his own question he was snoring in his chair.

Behind the train, so close that it might almost have formed an integral part of it, John Haynes and Theobald were speeding in their one-wheeled automobile upon a single rail. And underneath the busy gyroscope hummed, ever so faintly, the tune accorded well with the Englishman's hand; it hummed as merrily as his own thoughts, and yet it soothed him with its monotonous murmuring. All the while the snow fell steadily. But the automobile ran through it snugly and comfortably; there was not the slightest jar or vibration. When the train quickened its speed the vehicle did the same. It could have outpaced the train in a run of a hundred miles and met her half way back.

"We must be nearing the foothills of the Blue Mountains, Theobald," said John Haynes, half an hour later. "They stretch for forty miles or so before we enter upon the steepest grade at the head of Blue River. I think we'll make our preparations."

Theobald shivered and rose, grasping his instrument case. At that moment he felt like a man bewitched, helpless, hypnotized by the power of his terrible master.

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"It's finished," said Theobald, fifteen minutes later, and Haynes arose. At the first light he started back in sheer amazement; then laughed uproariously at the grim humor of the situation. For Theobald had done his work too well. The sight of the face of his old enemy had filled Haynes with scarcely controllable anger; but now—it was a different man. For Theobald had almost bloodlessly made deft little cuts in certain facial muscles which made the cheeks hang flabby and loose; he had touched tiny muscles about the eyes and eyelids which had altered the whole aspect of the Judge's face, he had filled in the sagging flesh under the eyes with paraffin, even now hardening and not distinguishable from healthy tissue; he had given an upward turn to the eyebrows; and a scowling droop to the mouth; and lastly he had snipped an infinitely small muscle in the sclerotic membrane of the eye which made Charteris' eyes, when the lids were lifted, diverge extravagantly.

And Clancy had a pronounced squint of just that character. Theobald had done his work too well.

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peace descended over Judge Charteris. He nodded his head and dozed, his repose deepened, soothed by the good whisky with which his friend Hopkins had supplied him. When he awakened, he had reflected, he would be speeding through the desert, miles from Nokomis. Had he not better undress and go to bed? Before he answered his own question he was snoring in his chair.

Behind the train, so close that it might almost have formed an integral part of it, John Haynes and Theobald were speeding in their one-wheeled automobile upon a single rail. And underneath the busy gyroscope hummed, ever so faintly, the tune accorded well with the Englishman's hand; it hummed as merrily as his own thoughts, and yet it soothed him with its monotonous murmuring. All the while the snow fell steadily. But the automobile ran through it snugly and comfortably; there was not the slightest jar or vibration. When the train quickened its speed the vehicle did the same. It could have outpaced the train in a run of a hundred miles and met her half way back.

"We must be nearing the foothills of the Blue Mountains, Theobald," said John Haynes, half an hour later. "They stretch for forty miles or so before we enter upon the steepest grade at the head of Blue River. I think we'll make our preparations."

Theobald shivered and rose, grasping his instrument case. At that moment he felt like a man bewitched, helpless, hypnotized by the power of his terrible master.

Haynes slowed down to twenty miles, leaped the machine from the rail to the roadbed, and, putting on speed again, caught up with the vanishing train. Throwing back the hood of the runabout, he stood upon the step a moment in the pelting snow, ran alongside of the train, and flinging a rope noose, one end of which was fixed to his steering wheel, made the runabout fast. He leaped aboard the train, and standing on the back platform, he strained at the rope, working it until the runabout shifted, and his course, caught the rail again and ran on smoothly behind. Then, at his

device by which Haynes had attached it to the gasoline engine which controlled it; nor had the author the least conception of the personality of this "devil of crime," as he quaintly depicted him. Haynes was glad of these things, for as long as the nature of his contrivance remained unknown he felt secure from capture, and with his own scheme unguessed at, he could be sure of success. None of the land gang would dare to reveal the story. Above the rattle of the train he heard the fussy, panting breathing of his ally as he moved to and fro, busy about his work. Suppose he should assault him with his instruments or tie a chloroform wrapped cloth round his own face, he thought—and smiled. He did not turn his head. He was a judge of men.

"It's finished," said Theobald, fifteen minutes later, and Haynes arose. At the first light he started back in sheer amazement; then laughed uproariously at the grim humor of the situation. For Theobald had done his work too well. The sight of the face of his old enemy had filled Haynes with scarcely controllable anger; but now—it was a different man. For Theobald had almost bloodlessly made deft little cuts in certain facial muscles which made the cheeks hang flabby and loose; he had touched tiny muscles about the eyes and eyelids which had altered the whole aspect of the Judge's face, he had filled in the sagging flesh under the eyes with paraffin, even now hardening and not distinguishable from healthy tissue; he had given an upward turn to the eyebrows; and a scowling droop to the mouth; and lastly he had snipped an infinitely small muscle in the sclerotic membrane of the eye which made Charteris' eyes, when the lids were lifted, diverge extravagantly.

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